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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 000473

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: CHEN USING BUSH SPEECH TO PROMOTE REFORM AGENDA

Classified By: AIT Director Douglas Paal; Reasons: 1.4 (B/D)

[11.](#) (C) Summary: President Chen Shui-bian is actively touting President Bush's inaugural call to spread freedom and democracy as a validation of his efforts to push forward with constitutional reform. During a January 31 speech in Guam, President Chen characterized Taiwan as a key ally in President Bush's initiative to expand the community of democracies. Local analysts say that Chen is likely to exploit the USG focus on democratization to justify policies such as referenda and constitutional revision that are anathema to Beijing. Taiwan observers tell AIT that President Bush's inaugural speech played well with the Taiwan public, leading to expectations that relations with Washington would improve in a second term. Some Chen administration officials tell AIT privately, however, that Chen's mismanagement of U.S.-Taiwan relations over the past two years may negate any bounce Taiwan might have gained from a new USG focus on democracy building. End summary.

Chen Pushing His Own Agenda

[12.](#) (C) President Chen Shui-bian is touting President Bush's inauguration speech references to freedom and democracy to validate his constitutional reform agenda. During a January 31 speech to local Taiwan community leaders in Guam and other recent public events, Chen has described his plan for constitutional reform as paralleling President Bush's inaugural call to expand freedom and democracy. In Guam, Chen said that President Bush's initiative can "form the basis of future cooperation between Taiwan and the U.S." and touting an emerging "alliance of values" between Taipei and Washington. In a congratulatory letter to President Bush on his re-election, Chen also made a clear reference to his plan for constitution reform when he said he was "encouraged that the U.S. would seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions" in every nation.

A Blank Check?

[13.](#) (C) Local political observers have warned that President Bush's speech may be utilized by Chen and his Pan-Green supporters for "whatever they want." National Taiwan University Professor Chiang Ming-ching told AIT that President Bush's speech gave the Chen administration "a blank-check." Chiang said that the Pan-Green camp sees liberty and freedom as something that all Taiwanese must enjoy, particularly the right of self-determination. Chiang believes that in Chen's mind, President Bush's speech validates Chen's grass roots campaign to promote such initiatives as changing the names of state institutions from "China" to "Taiwan" and major constitutional reform. Chiang also maintained that, in Chen's mind, "freedom" means the freedom to do whatever the people want, regardless of the consequences. Institute of National Policy Research (INPR) Executive Director Lo Chih-cheng separately offered a similar assessment, predicting that Chen would likely seize the initiative to promote his own image of freedom in Taiwan.

[14.](#) (C) Some analysts assessed that President Bush's focus on democracy and freedom would reassure the Taiwan public. Academia Sinica polling expert Hsu Yung-ming told AIT that liberty and democracy are very popular ideas in Taiwan. He said that many people are hopeful that President Bush's speech signals that Washington will stand closer to Taiwan than the PRC. Moreover, Hsu said that many Taiwanese expect that President Bush will push the PRC on democracy. Hsu believes that the Taiwanese think President Bush is a man of his word and will follow his speech with real actions. The INPR's Lo told AIT that President Bush was wise to emphasize freedom over democracy because every country can say they are a democracy, but it is more difficult to claim every country is free. For this reason, Lo argued that the PRC may feel a little uneasy and threatened after the speech. Lo added that the speech was important for Taiwan because it reminds people that they share the same values as the U.S.

Improved Taiwan-U.S. Relations?

[15.](#) (C) Many Taiwanese are hopeful that President's Bush

speech signaled a closer relationship with Washington. Lin Cheng-yi, the Director of European and American Studies at Academia Sinica and a former National Security Council (NSC) Senior Advisor told AIT that he was optimistic over prospects for closer Taipei-Washington ties after hearing President Bush's speech. Although Lin noted that President Bush did not mention China when he singled out countries that lacked freedom, Lin believes that the Bush Administration's second term goals track closely with Taiwan's efforts to reform the constitution. He opined that these factors suggest that there is hope that Taiwan-U.S. relations will be closer as a result of Washington's ideals-based initiative. Lin added that many Taiwanese think that President Bush will support Taiwan because Taipei represents the values President Bush highlighted as major goals for his second term.

The Cynical View

16. (C) While Pan-Green analysts were generally heartened by President Bush's inaugural speech, opposition observers expressed skepticism. Professor Emile Sheng from Soochow University told AIT that the speech was not about Taiwan and the PRC at all. He said the cross-Strait situation is a unique issue and President Bush's speech should not be taken literally. Sheng said that most people in Taiwan were not aroused by the speech because they know that the speech was on places like Iraq and North Korea, not China. Academia Sinica's Hsu noted that President Bush did not mention Beijing in his speech, suggesting that Washington sees a need for the PRC for help with North Korea and anti-terrorism initiatives. He said that, President Bush's inaugural address notwithstanding, Taiwan is worried President Bush will sacrifice Taiwanese interests at the hands of Beijing.

Comment: Chen Taking the Initiative

17. (C) While President Bush's speech did not generate an unusually large amount of publicity in Taiwan, President Chen and his supporters have decided to get as much as they can out of it. Chen appears particularly eager to use President Bush's speech to justify his more controversial initiatives, including constitutional reforms. Chen administration foreign policy officials tell AIT privately that they realize that frictions in U.S.-Taiwan relationship are not going to be overcome simply because of shared interest in promoting abstract issues like freedom and democracy. However, in his dealings with the Taiwan public, media, and U.S. supporters, Chen is likely to invoke these themes to justify policies that may impact on more concrete U.S. policy issues in the region.

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